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## SELECTED.

### THE DEATH OF LA PUCELLE.

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*And look ye, sire! because she is a maid,  
Save for no faggots, let there be no more!  
Place barrels of pitch upon the fatal stake,  
That so her torture may be shortened.*  
SHAKESPEARE.

Three months had elapsed—since in the flower of youth and beauty, in the flush of conquest, and in the accomplishment of all her own, of all her country's obligations, the Maid of Arc had fallen, through the envious treason of the Count of Flavy,—he who had shut the gates, and raised the bridges of Compeigne against her—into the hands of John de Luxembourg,—since he, false gentleman and recreant knight, had sold the heroine of France—sold her, despite the prayers, despite the tears and the reproaches of his high-minded lady—sold her for base and sordid lucre to her unaring foemen. Three months had elapsed of wearisome confinement—not in guarded chamber;—not with the blessed light of heaven streaming, albeit through grates of iron, into her prison-segments;—not with the miserable semblance of freedom, that might be fancied to exist in the permission to pace the narrow floor;—not with the wonted dungeon-fare of the worst malefactor;—not with the consolations of religion, vouchsafed even to the dying murderer; not even with the wretched boon of solitude! No—in a dungeon many a foot beneath the surface of the frozen earth, wit' nought of air, but what descended through a deep-cut funnel; with nought of light, but what was furnished by a pale and winking lamp; loaded with a weight of fetters that would have bowed the strongest man—arms to child-like helplessness; bound with a massive chain about her waist, making her to the rocky floor; fed on the bread of bitterness, her thirst slaked with the waters of sorrow; her feelings outraged by the continual presence of a brutal soldier, violating the privacies, alike by day and night, of her sad condition; the noble girl had languished without a hope of rescue, without even a dream of liberty or life; taunted by her foes, and persecuted; deserted by her friends and utterly forgotten. Yet, though her frame was shrunken with disease and worn with famine, though her bright eyes were dimmed with weariness and watching, her dark locks streaked, as it were, by premature old age, her stature bent to half its former height, and her whole appearance deprived of that high and lustrous beauty that had of yore been so peculiarly her own; her confidence in Him, whom she believed, erroneously perhaps, but not therefore the less fervently, to have sent her on that especial mission which she had so gloriously accomplished—her confidence in that being whose decrees are, of a truth, inscrutable—was all unshaken. If she had formerly displayed the courage to inflict, she now exhibited, and yet more forcibly, the nobler courage to endure. If she had proved herself the equal of men in the melee of active valor, she now showed herself to be endowed in no secondary degree with the calm fortitude of her sex, the uncomplaining, patient resignation to inevitable pain or inconsolable affliction which is so much rarer than the bold front which rushes forth to meet the coming danger. Day

after day she had been led forth from her cold dungeon, to undergo examination, to hear accusations the most inconceivably absurd, to confute arguments, the confutation of which aided her cause in nothing; for when did prejudice, or—yet worse than prejudice—fanatic bigotry, hear the voice of reason, and hear it to conviction. Night after night she had been led back to the chilly atmosphere of the dank cell, hopeless of rescue or acquittal; harassed by persecution, feeble of frame, and sick at heart, yet high and firm in her uncompromising spirit as when she first rode forth, with consecrated blade and banner, to raise the siege of Orleans. From the very commencement of her protracted trial she had felt a sure foreknowledge of its termination! She had known, that in the hearts of her judges her doom was written down already; yet with a calm confidence that would have well become a Socrates, nay, or the apostle of a holier creed, she had striven to prove her innocence to posterity at least, if not to the passing day—to eternity at least, if not to time! When reviled, she answered not—when taunted, her replies were meek but pertinent—when harassed by the simultaneous questioning of her hard-hearted judges, eager to confuse by clamor or the weak woman whom they could not confound by sophistry, she was collected as the sagest jurist, undisturbed as though she were pleading another's cause and not her own. The base Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais the bigoted, bribed fanatic, to whom had been committed the conduct of her judicial murder, strove hard, but strove in vain, to wring from her pale lips some evidence of unholy dealings, for which he might condemn her to the stake, some word of petulance which he might construe into treason.

"Swear"—he cried in haughty and imperious tones, from his crimson chair of state to the fair frail girl, who, clad in sack-cloth, with bare feet and dishevelled hair, stood at his footstool, upheld by the supporting might of conscious innocence—"Swear to speak truth—question thee as we may!"

"I may not swear, most holy Bish," she replied, and her eye flashed for a moment, and her lip curled as she spoke, so that men deemed it irony—"I may not swear, most righteous judge—since you may question me of that, which to reveal would be foul perjury—so should I, if I swore, stand perjured in the same by speech or silence!"

"Swear—Joan of Domremi, most falsely styled of Orleans and of Arc—Swear to thy judges, that thou wilt seek no rescue—attempt no escape!"

"Be not your fetters strong enough?" she asked in answer; and she half raised her feeble arm, to show the weight of rusty steel that had already well nigh crippled it—"Be not your fetters strong enough—your rock-hewn vaults, where never comes the first-created gift of natural light—your iron cages, and your steel clad warders—be they not guards enough, that ye would bind me yet more straitly? This will I not swear, O thou most merciful, so shall you not condemn me of faith broken."

"Then thou dost look to rescue—dost hope for liberty—wouldst evade, hadst thou the power, the bonds of Holy Church?"

"To whom should I look for rescue, save to Him who has abandoned his frail servant for her own transgression."

"Ha! she confesses!"

"Mark well the words—Sir scribe."

"Judgment—Lord President—A judgment!"

"No need for farther question!"

"She has avowed it."

Such were the disjointed clamors that burst at once in fiendish exultation from the lips of that holy seeming conclave; but ere the wily Bishop could express his sentiments, the maiden again took up the word.

"I have confessed—Great Sirs—I have confessed transgression—And make not ye the same—at prime, at noon, and at vesper—the same avowal? Riddle me then the difference, ye holy men, between the daily penitence ye proffer, for the daily sins which even ye confess, and this the free confession of a prisoner—a helpless, friendless, persecuted prisoner! Tell me, Lord Bishop, what am I, that I should suffer judgment to the uttermost, for the same avowal that thou makest daily, if thou dost obey the bidding of Him whose cross thou hast uplifted! But ye did ask me if I hope for liberty—if I would exchange the prison-house—the hall of condemnation, and the bread of tears, for the free air, the blessed sunshine, and the humblest peasant's fare! Go ask the wild herds of the forest, will they prefer the yoke and the goad, the halter and the stall, to the green woods and liberal pastures in which their Maker set them!—Go ask the eagle, will he endure the jesses and the hood of the trained goshawk, will he choose the perch and mew before the boundless azure, will he list to the whistle, or regard the lure of the falconer when the thunder is rolling beneath him, when the lightning, which he alone can gaze upon undazzled, is flashing round the aerie his creator made him to inhabit. If these shall answer ye—then will I do your bidding, and swear to keep my prison, though the chains should be stricken from my limbs and the door of deliverance opened; though the fagot were kindled to consume me on the one hand, and the throne of your monarch were tendered on the other! Then will I swear—Sir Priest—and not till then!"

Such was the tone, and such the tenor of all her speeches; ever submissive to the forms, to the ordinances, and to the spirit of religion; ever professing her faith in holy writ; her whole and sole reliance on the Virgin and her blessed Son; ever denying and disproving the charge of witchery or demon worship—offering to confess under the sacramental seal—to confess to her very judges—she yet suffered them to know, at all times, to perceive, by every glance of her eye, to hear in every word of her mouth, that it was the religion they professed, and not the men who professed it, to which her deference was paid, to which her veneration was due.

Still though they labored to the utmost to force her into such confession as might be a pretext for her condemnation, the court could by no means so far confuse her understanding, or so corrupt the judges, as to effect its nefarious purpose. With a clear understanding of her own cause she refused, at once and boldly, to answer those questions on nice points of

doctrine which she perceived to have no bearing on her case. On every other matter, she spoke openly and with the confidence of innocence, maintaining to the last, however, that "Spirits, were they good or evil, had appeared to her;" but denying that she had ever by precept, by spell or charm, invoked the aid of supernatural powers, otherwise than by the prayers of the church offered in christian purity of purpose to the most Holy Virgin and her everlasting Son. It was at length proposed that the question should be enforced by the means of torture! But by Cauchon himself the proposition was overruled—not in mercy, however,—not in charity towards a weak and suffering woman, but in the deepest refinement of cruelty. Confident, as he then was, that she would be condemned to the fierce ordeal of the fagot and the stake, he spared her the rack lest by exhausting her powers of endurance it might diminish the duration of her mortal agonies. Eitterly, however, was that corrupt judge and false shepherd disappointed when the decisive verdict was pronounced—"perpetual chains—the bread of sorrow and the waters of misery!"—The courts ecclesiastic had no weapon to affect her life, and for the present the secular arm had dismissed her beyond the reach of its tyrannic violence. The sentence was heard by the meek prisoner in the silence of despair—she was remanded to her living tomb—she passed through the gloomy archway—the bolts groaned heavily behind her—she deemed that all was over, that she should perish there—there, in that dark abyss, uncheered by the fresh air or the fair daylight, unpitied by her relentless foemen, unsuccored by her faithless friends; and she felt that death—any death, so it were but speedy—had been preferable to the endurance of that protracted torture which life had now become to her, who lately fought and feasted at the right hand of princes.

Not all the sufferings, however, of the wretched girl; not all the mental agonies and corporeal pains, that she must bear in silence, could satisfy the fears of England, or the policy of England's Regent. It was not in revenge, much less in hatred, that the wise Bedford urged it upon the court that they should destroy—not her body only, but her fame. He well knew it was enthusiasm only that had thus far supported her and liberated France; he deemed not, for a moment, that she was either a heavenly messenger, or mortal champion; but he felt, that France believed in joy—England in trembling!—he felt, that dead or living—so she died a martyr—Joan would be equally victorious. Her death, if attributed to vengeance, would but stir up the kindling blood of Gaul to hotter anger, would but beat down the doggedness of Saxon valor with remorse and superstitious terror!

"Hast thou earned thy See," he cried at their first interview, "False Bishop! As well she were a horse and in the field, as living thus a famous prisoner! She must die! die, Sir Priest, not as a criminal, but as a witch and heretic! Her name must be a scoff and a reproach to France—her death an honor to her slayers; a sacrifice acceptable to Mother Church, and laudable throughout all Christendom! See it be done, Sir,—Nay, interrupt me not, nor parley; an thou